

Erebus families face hard decision

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Thirty years after Captain Jim Collins died at Mt Erebus, his widow and four daughters are faced with having to decide which one of them will fly to the site of New Zealand's worst air disaster.

Air New Zealand has drawn a ballot to decide which five families of the 257 people who died in the Antarctica crash on November 28, 1979, will be represented at the memorial service on the 30th anniversary.

One seat had been allocated to the family of Mr Collins, but his daughter Kathryn Carter said they were yet to decide who would go.

The family were having "circular discussions" as they tried to choose. "It's hard to prioritise grief and say you suffered more so you can go."

Her family were pleased there was an opportunity for at least one person to go, but realised that for other families the selection process the airline used was problematic.

Mrs Carter said that, if she did not go, she would still like one day to see the beauty that her father saw before he died.

She said the memorial service would be an opportunity for the entire country to remember those who had perished in the disaster.

Jackie Nankervis lost her father and uncle when the DC10 crashed into Mt Erebus. Despite feeling "deflated" at not being allocated a place on the anniversary flight, she too hoped that one day she would get to visit the crash site.

After the crash her father's blackened wallet had been returned to her mother, but other than that, the family had nothing to connect them to the place where he died.

She said she wanted to know if Air New Zealand would offer any other flights to next of kin in the future. "We relive the whole thing every year. Going there would be some closure."

In addition to the five next of kin of those who died, one Government representative and the Very Rev Peter Beck from Christchurch Cathedral will also travel to Antarctica.

Air New Zealand said its general manager of airline operations and its chief pilot would also go, along with two Television New Zealand staff, who would broadcast the service.

Family members were being given the opportunity to send messages to their loved ones on the flight. These would be placed in a capsule near the site.

In New Zealand, services will be held in Auckland and Christchurch, and they are expected to feature a video of the service at Mt Erebus. An Erebus anniversary service will also be held at the memorial garden at Waikumete Cemetery in Auckland.

Air New Zealand said the services would also mark the first anniversary of the A320 accident at Perpignan, off the coast of France, on November 28 last year.

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